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Sunday School That Clicks

Lesson 10 / February 7, 2010

# Faith, Rewards, and Suffering

for use as

STEP 1 

Lesson 10  
**Focus:**

God tests and rewards  
our faith.

Lesson 10  
**Bible Basis:**

Matthew 15:21-28

Students will discuss the suffering of the people of Haiti as part of a general discussion of what faith is and how God tests and rewards our faith.

OPENING STORY [read it aloud to your class, or make copies and pass it around]:

## HAITI EARTHQUAKE IS A TEST OF FAITH

Churches in Haiti and Haitian churches in the U.S. continue to pray and provide aid for the people of Haiti as people there try to regain a footing after the devastating earthquake only a few weeks ago. The natural disaster has caused the death of more than 100,000 people and left at least a million others displaced with likely many more in need of aid to remain healthy.

Solid Rock First Haitian Tabernacle of Grace Church in Raleigh, North Carolina, continues to meet in the evenings to pray, sing, and remember those who were lost in the devastation. The Atlanta Haitian Church of God continues to receive donations from the local Haitian community to help in the relief efforts.

"We are united, we are strong and resilient, and we will get through this with faith and God," said Dr. Robert Bouloute, a pastor at the Atlanta church.

The 7.0-magnitude earthquake struck at 4:53 p.m. January 12, 10 miles southwest of the capital city of Port-au-Prince. The natural event instantaneously collapsed buildings of all sizes. About half of the buildings in the city were completely destroyed, including eight hospitals.

"With so many buildings destroyed and so many people made homeless, the need for shelter and basic essentials such as food and water continues to be extremely urgent," reported Matthew Frost, chief executive of U.K.-based Tearfund.

The people of Port-au-Prince's Roman Catholic cathedral still gather for Mass in what remains of their house of worship, and give thanks for simply being alive.

Lesson 10  
**Memory Verse**

Then Jesus answered,  
 “Woman, you have  
 great faith! Your  
 request is granted.”  
 And her daughter was  
 healed from that very  
 hour.

—Matthew 15:28

“Why give thanks to God? Because we are here,” the Rev. Eric Toussaint says. “We are in the hands of God now.”

Some Christian groups currently involved in relief efforts include World Vision, the Salvation Army, Samaritan’s Purse, and Compassion International. Many of these relief agencies were already present when the earthquake hit, and consequently some of the workers for these agencies lost their lives.

Many Christians have been at a loss as to how to respond to cataclysmic disasters such the earthquake in Haiti, especially when it comes to those who are trying to understand why a loving God would allow something like this happen.

Some of them simply respond by abandoning the faith.

Just over 50 years ago, an evangelist who participated in Billy Graham’s crusades considered the suffering of the sort that is happening in Haiti right now, and concluded, “No, we should not celebrate God’s faithfulness . . . because He doesn’t even exist.”

And so, the Reverend Charles Templeton became an atheist in response to natural disasters, and never returned to the faith.

Later, when Templeton was asked if there was one thing in particular that caused him to lose his faith, he said, “It was a photograph in *Life* magazine.” The photograph showed a starving woman in Africa holding her deceased baby.

Templeton thought, “Is it possible to believe that there is a loving or caring Creator when all this woman needed was *rain*?” He asked his interviewer, “Who runs the rain? I don’t; you don’t. But He does—or that’s what I thought. But when I saw the photograph, I immediately knew it is not possible for this to happen and for there to be a loving God.”

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Today’s lesson focus is that God tests but also rewards faith. But we might be wise to remember that He decides the instances for tests and the times for reward. The daughter of the woman in today’s Gospel story was healed because of the mother’s faith. But even Jesus, at another time and place, reminded His listeners that not all people are rescued from natural disasters, and not all people who are sick get healed (Luke 4:25-27). Jesus simply stated this as if it were something that everyone should realize is true—but His remarks provoked such a rage in His hearers that they ran Him out of town and intended to throw Him over a cliff.

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Some of the people trapped in the collapsed buildings of Port-au-Prince were miraculously rescued, and their families rejoice in God’s goodness. Other families, some of whom have a deep faith in Jesus Christ, are now in the test and grieving the loss of loved ones.

The reality of the tests and rewards of faith in God confronts believers and seekers around the world. Let’s explore this challenge further.

[Now form small groups and answer the following questions.]

- ▶ **What is a God-honoring, faith-filled response you might give to people who say God could have prevented some disaster or disease but didn’t?** (*You might want to consult such Bible verses as Job 1:21; 2:10; Matt. 5:45; Luke 13:1-17; 2 Cor. 1:3-7; Heb. 11:32-40.*)
- ▶ **What is the greatest challenge to your faith that you have ever experienced?**
- ▶ **What did you gain through the challenge—or how are you responding to a present test?**
- ▶ **Do you know someone who has had one of these responses to great suffering? If so, tell what happened and especially what they did or didn’t do that led them to their conclusion.**
  - A. Abandonment of the faith
  - B. Deeply-rooted bitterness
  - C. An insufferable attitude of martyrdom
- ▶ **How do we make sense of the tests to our faith and rewards for our faith that come within any particular circumstances such as an earthquake.**

[When you are finished with the questions, go on to Step 2 in your *Adult Teacher’s Guide*, where you read the Scripture and begin to discuss it.]

News Sources:

[gospelherald.net/article/international/45970/haitian-christians-gather-to-pray-amid-post-quake-efforts.htm](http://gospelherald.net/article/international/45970/haitian-christians-gather-to-pray-amid-post-quake-efforts.htm)

[Paullundquist.blogspot.com](http://Paullundquist.blogspot.com)

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## STEP 4

### Lesson 10 Focus:

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### Lesson 10 Bible Basis:

Matthew 15:21-28

## AN OPENNESS TO THE UNEXPLAINABLE

“It is right to praise and thank God for every instance of rescue and provision and charity and heroism on the island of Haiti. And it is right to acknowledge His goodness and wisdom and worthiness, when, despite our best efforts, everything goes horribly wrong.” —Pastor Paul Lundquist


C.S. Lewis once said that if the basis of our faith is little more than a house of cards, then the sooner that house falls, the better.

Unhealthy responses to suffering often stem from a biblically-baseless set of expectations of how a loving and caring God should act under certain circumstances.

Perhaps what we need most is more openness to the sometimes unexplainable mysteries of the outworking of God’s sovereign will. As Job said, “The LORD gave, and the LORD has taken away; may the name of the LORD be praised” (Job 1:21).

[Activity]

Return to the groups you had in Step 1 and discuss the following questions.

 **Point out the truths (or lies) in the following statements and discuss how each might hinder or help us explain suffering and pain in the world?**

- “Sometimes it’s helpful to know that everything happens for a reason, even though we may never know what those reasons are.”

- “The majority of godly, faithful characters in the Bible suffered some sort of significant loss during their lifetimes—so, as believers, we should not expect anything less.”

- “God can control everything but sometimes chooses not to. He can use everything that happens to bring about His good for those who seek Him and will follow His way.”

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- ▶ How can an openness to the mystery of God’s will and His perspective on eternity give us comfort and strength during times of suffering?
- ▶ How have you seen God reward faith, even in the midst of personal tragedy? If you haven’t, how might God do this?
- ▶ Discuss what your response has been to the Haitian earthquake thus far as a church. How can your class continue to help—as individuals, as a class, through your church, or through your denomination?

Close the class in prayer, asking God for the patience and courage to grow our faith in times of suffering, even though the reasons for what is happening evade us.

(David C. Cook is not affiliated with and does not endorse any Website listed on these pages.)